

## 7 VISION & PLAN FRAMEWORK

Provided in this section of the report is a presentation of the community's vision for H Street and an introduction to the four focus areas around which the Plan's recommendations are organized.

### 7.1.Vision

Much of the discussion during public meetings and the design charrette focused on the corridor's colorful history and special qualities. While some shared their concern about current problems, many spoke of a brighter future. Diverse stakeholders talked about the importance of making H Street a safe and attractive place offering opportunities and activities for the whole neighborhood—young and old, families and singles, newcomers and old-timers. People spoke of the importance of supporting existing businesses, creating new opportunities for local entrepreneurs, and attracting new investment. They talked about the importance of protecting the street's character, promoting a unique 'sense of place,' and ensuring that new projects complement rather than detract from the area's best qualities.

Emerging from these discussions was a shared vision for the future of H Street—a vision of a great neighborhood shopping street, serving resident needs, providing connections to the larger City, and improving the livability of the surrounding community. Elements of the vision follow.

**A Rich Mix of Uses.** A revitalized H Street should be thought of as a string of unique but interrelated places, each serving a range of neighborhood needs. The plan calls for

an improved library facility, the strengthening of existing businesses, and the attraction of new uses: retail shops, restaurants, and housing opportunities. The plan envisions improved and new places to live, shop, eat, and be entertained, all of which will promote a more safe and attractive street environment and provide new opportunities for employment.

**A Quality Public Realm.** The quality of the public realm—streets, sidewalks and public-rights-of-way—has a powerful influence on community livability and economic vitality. To ensure success, the corridor's public spaces must be clean, safe, and attractive. A comprehensive program of streetscape improvements—curb, gutters, and sidewalks; decorative benches and streetlights; etc.—along with efforts to improve safety, fix-up storefronts, and attract new businesses and residences will contribute to the creation of a lively public environment.

**Streets for People.** H Street should be designed to serve a number of travel modes—automobile, bus, transit, and pedestrian. The corridor should be accessible to residents and visitors as well as offer connections to amenities throughout the District. H Street should be designed to provide for safe, comfortable pedestrian movement as well as parking and vehicular circulation. Improvements to the Hopscotch Bridge and Eastern Gateway will further improve the corridor's walkability.

**Quality Design and Development.** New buildings along the corridor should be designed in ways that respect the community's character; protect neighborhood livability; and

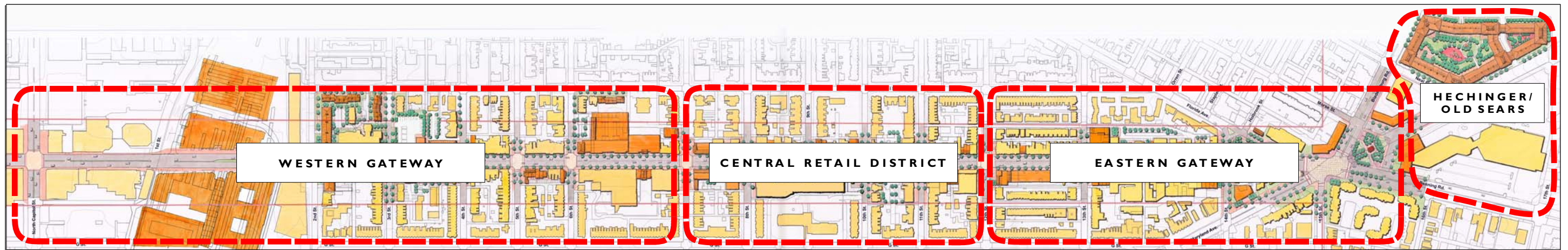
contribute to the making of active streets and public spaces. New development should be urban in character and use, bringing life to the street, complementing historic buildings, and reinforcing a 'sense of place.' Through the use of design guidelines and preservation incentives, the community can ensure that new investment is of the highest quality.

**Leveraging Transit Investments.** The corridor's attractiveness is greatly enhanced by transit. The proximity of Metro Stations at Union Station and New York Avenue (planned), the presence of high capacity bus lines, and plans for bus rapid transit or street cars will strengthen connections between the neighborhood and the rest of the City. For the corridor, this improved connectivity can add new life to the street, increase pedestrian traffic, improve visibility for retailers, and temper demand for parking.

**Respect for History, Heritage and Diversity.** The history of H Street and the surrounding neighborhoods provides a strong foundation for the corridor's future. The Plan calls for uses that support the entire neighborhood, the preservation and adaptive reuse of the corridor's most historic buildings, and new buildings that reinforce the street's uniqueness. To raise awareness of local history, the Plan calls for new programs and initiatives to interpret and celebrate history.

### 7.2 Plan Framework

The concepts presented in the Strategic Development Plan are organized around a vision of the corridor as a special place in the City composed of four distinct but



interrelated districts. While each district has its own unique qualities and opportunities, plan recommendations build towards a larger vision of the corridor as a safe, attractive, and interesting destination. Following this framework, the Plan’s development and preservation recommendations are provided for the entire corridor as well as the four districts: the Western Gateway, the Central Retail District, the Eastern Gateway, and the Hechinger Mall/Old Sears Sites. For each of the districts, the Plan offers land use, preservation, urban design, and development strategies, all of which are designed to contribute to the revitalization of the whole corridor.

The four districts were defined based on the findings of the conditions assessment and market analysis, and refined through discussions with community stakeholders. Factors such as walking distance, building and site vacancy, planned development, proximity to transit, and existing land use supported the team’s decisions regarding boundaries and area-specific development strategies. Please note that the boundaries of the districts have been defined for planning purposes only—the boundaries between districts should be interpreted as transitions rather than hard edges.

An introduction to each focus area, including the rationale behind its definition, follows.

### **Western Gateway: Urban Living with Retail Support (North Capitol Street to 7th Street)**

The Western Gateway, extending from North Capitol Street to 7<sup>th</sup> Street, serves as the literal and symbolic bridge between H Street, North Capitol Street, Union Station, and destinations throughout the core of the City. Walking

distance from Union Station played a strong role in defining the limits of the district—the entire area is within a 10-12 minute walk of a Metro station, making development and adaptive reuse projects particularly attractive to residents, retailers and office tenants seeking to benefit from regional transit accessibility. Planned developments at Station Place and the Union Station Air-Rights site and the concentration of vacant sites and buildings further contribute to the district’s potential.

With proper planning, new buildings along the Hopscotch Bridge and between 2nd and 4th Streets can bring new life to this end of the corridor. With entries directly on the bridge, active storefronts, pedestrian amenities, and improved access to Union Station, the Hopscotch Bridge can become an attractive extension of the corridor and a critical link to new uses. Larger sites in single ownership make higher density, mixed-use projects possible and allow a sensitive transition from Station Place and the Air Rights development to lower scale buildings between 4th and 7th Streets. Mixed-use development at this end of the corridor reinforces the concept of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), the District’s policy of focusing mixed-use activity nodes close to major transportation hubs.

### **Central Retail District (7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> Street)**

Plans for the Central Retail District recognize this area’s long history as the neighborhood’s primary shopping destination. The area around the intersection of 8<sup>th</sup> and H Streets continues to benefit from its position as the corridor’s

‘100% corner’—the place where the transportation network best supports retail activity. Several transportation-related factors—the crossing of high volume bus lines, the passing of 24,000 vehicles per day, and foot traffic from the neighborhood—make this area attractive to a mix of local, regional, and national retailers. Recent building renovations and the low number vacant sites and storefronts are clear signs of the area’s viability as a retail destination.

Recommendations for the Central Retail District focus on leveraging existing assets—strong existing businesses, quality building stock, and excellent accessibility. Recommendations include initiatives to increase the competitiveness of existing businesses, attract new investment, encourage the renovation of storefronts and buildings, attract small office and apartment uses in upper story spaces, and encourage infill development on vacant and underused sites. Full-time on-street parking along with proposed public parking facilities at the district’s edges—at the redeveloped Murry’s and Auto Zone sites—will help support the district’s development.

### **Eastern Gateway: Arts and Entertainment (12<sup>th</sup> Street to Bladensburg Avenue)**

Building on the success of the H Street Playhouse, the presence of the R. L. Christian Library, plans for the Atlas Theater’s rebirth, and the area’s historic buildings, the Plan envisions the eastern end of the corridor developing as destination for restaurants, cafes, galleries, small shops, and studio spaces serving the needs of theatergoers, the District arts community, and neighborhood residents. Extending from 12<sup>th</sup> Street to Bladensburg Road, this area will act as a

magnet for arts and entertainment-related investments and a catalyst for the celebration of local heritage and culture. Improved library facilities are expected to play an important role in the area’s future—a new facility or greatly improved facility could provide a civic presence and an important educational and cultural anchor for neighborhood residents, especially children. The plan also calls for the redesign of the intersection of H and 15<sup>th</sup> Streets with Florida, Maryland, Bladensburg, and Benning Avenues to improve conditions for pedestrians, calm traffic, and create a new space for a memorial or public art.

This area, in combination with the Central Retail District, will further improve the street’s image as a unique and interesting destination. Recommendations for this area include initiatives to attract new investment, encourage the renovation of storefronts and buildings, attract small office and apartment uses in upper story spaces, encourage infill development on vacant and underused sites, and increase the availability of parking.

### **Hechinger Mall/Old Sears Sites (Bladensburg Avenue to 17<sup>th</sup> Street)**

Plans for the Hechingers Mall/Old Sears Sites focus on the on-going improvement of Hechinger Mall and the attraction of new development on the Old Sears Site that serves neighborhood needs without competing against H Street retailers. The plan supports the development of this site for either residential or commercial use so long as the design is sensitive to the surrounding neighborhood.